DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 115 071 EC 080 694

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TITLE	A Project Designed to Increase Exceptional Child Services to Northeast Alabama.
INSTITUTION	Jacksonville State Univ., Ala.
SPONS AGENCY	Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO	451-AH-50781
PUB DATE	[75]
NOTE	7p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS	Conferences; Educational Diagnosis; Exceptional Child Education; *Handicapped Children; *Inservice Teacher Education; Leadership Training; *Rural Education; *Special Education; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS	Alabama; *Project Outreach

ABSTRACT

Project Outreach was designed to increase exceptional child services to 14 rural school systems. In order to attract special education teachers to rural areas, the Project conducted in-service training sessions at eight Local Education Agencies aimed at the needs of the graduate level teacher from the Appalachian area of Northeast Alabama. In addition to in-service training, the Project provided the following services: a conference on management of emotionally disturbed children in the classroom, a leadership training institute, a workshop for psychometrists, a summer conference on identification of critical issues in special education, a teacher exchange program, and an assessment workshop for educational diagnosticians. (SB)

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By Dreg Frith

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A PROJECT DESIGNED TO INCREASE EXCEPTIONAL CHILD SERVICES TO NORTHEAST ALABAMA

Introduction

The Special Education Department at Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Alabama, has received funding during the last two years from the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped for the purpose of providing in-service training to fourteen school systems throughout Northeast Alabama. This project, known as "Outreach", is designed to upgrade professional competencies of teachers, educational diagnosticians, and administrators that are presently employed within approximately a 75 mile geographical radius of the University.

Educational Significance

Approximately forty percent of the special education teachers in Alabama reside in the Northeastern section of the State. Assuming that the number of teachers is proportionate to the number of handicapped students, approximately forty percent of statewide incidence figures would be appropriate in ascertaining the number of prospective exceptional children in the service population of Jacksonville State University. Therefore, the actual number of children identified as needing special education services through teacher referral in Northeast Alabama would be approximately 50,000 with about 16,800 presently receiving services.

Components of the graduate teacher training program at Jacksonville State are inherent in the Outreach program to a large extent. One does not exist in isolation of the other. In many cases, students pursuing a Master of Science in Special Education are the same persons

receiving in-service training in their local systems through Project Outreach. The graduate program is presently limited to the area of mental retardation. This does not exclude service to local systems in areas other than mental retardation, which usually requires utilization of external consultants. The exception to this may be in the area of emotional disturbance, in which Jacksonville State recently began offering an undergraduate major. When personnel presently employed by the University have been used as consultants in the project, consultant fees have not been awarded.

While teacher surpluses may exist in parts of the country, in rural Northeast Alabama the need for teachers in all areas of exceptionality, including mental retardation, is still great. The problem of attracting special education teachers to rural areas is difficult to rectify. A possible solution appears to involve recruiting prospective graduate students from established teacher populations that presently exist in rural areas, with the expectation of their returning home upon graduation. Another alternative is to provide in-service training to teachers that are presently employed in the rural areas as has been attempted through Project Outreach. Ideally, these persons and the institution of higher education will be within commuting distance of one another, and therefore, students will not have to leave home to pursue a degree or receive additional training. Experience has dictated that undergraduate students tend to gravitate toward larger population centers while graduate students are more likely to return to the rural area, particularly when they were born and raised in the locale. Therefore the scope of Project Outreach

has been aimed at the in-service needs of the graduate level teacher from the Appalachian area in Northeast Alabama.

The number of teachers, administrators and educational diagnosticians who received services through the Project from September, 1974, until May, 1975, was approximately 727. That number is expected to increase in the present year as the number of involved Local Education Agencies increased from eight to fourteen. The following list includes the eight Local Education Agencies and the topics presented during their in-service training sessions in 1974-75.

Calhoun County-Reading
Piedmont City-Diagnosing pupil need and individualizing instruction
Gadsden-Etowah-Attalla-Reading, learning disabilities, emotional disturbance
Jacksonville City-Learning disabilities
Anniston City-Behavior management
Cherokee County-Emotional disturbance

Progress Report

In addition to the in-service training offered to the Local Education Agencies participating in Project Outreach, further services have been offered the Local Education Agencies through special education workshops. These have included the following:

In October, 1974, a conference was held at Pine Harbor Resort on MANAGEMENT OF EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED CHILDREN IN THE CLASSROOM. Dr. Nicholas Long, from Washington, D.C. and author of Conflict in the Classroom, was the keynote speaker. Those participating in the conference included teachers of emotionally disturbed children, regular classroom teachers, administrators, state education agency personnel, mental health personnel, Vocational Rehabilitation Service personnel, and University faculty.

A Leadership Training Institute was held at Cheaha State Park in the Fall of 1974. Participants included public school personnel, administrators, State Education Agency representatives, graduate students, Vocational Rehabilitation Service personnel, mental health professionals, and University personnel. Keynoter for this conference was Francis Lynch, Director, Division of Developmental Disabilities, HEW, Washington, D.C.

A one day workshop for psychometrists working in the surrounding school systems was held on the Jacksonville State University campus in March, 1975. Dr. Thomas Wentland, Chairman, Department of Communicative Disorders, University of Mississippi, was the major presentor. Dr. Wentland's presentation concentrated on an overview of the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities. There were twenty-five participants in the conference from eight Local Education Agencies.

On July 17-18, 1975, a summer conference was held at Lake Guntersville Resort on IDENTIFICATION OF CRITICAL ISSUES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION. Those serving as consultants to the conference were Dr. Martin Lavor, Dr. Betty Hare, Dr. Merle Karnes, Dr. Lyndal Bullock, and Barbara Ann Pope. Participants attending the conference included public school personnel, administrators, State Education Agency representatives, Vocational Rehabilitation Service staff, mental health personnel, and University personnel.

A primary advantage of the project is that it increases communication with personnel from Local Education Agencies. This improves working relationships not only involving Outreach, but also the undergraduate and graduate training programs as well. It is often difficult to

divorce a function of the Project from a function of the training program. A case in point was a teacher exchange program involving the Calhoun County School System. An agreement was reached with the Calhoun County School System whereby respective special education teachers who were enrolled in SPE 511, Internship in Special Education, were permitted to receive exposure to classroom situations other than their own. This exchange program in which some teachers were given total responsibility for a classroom and others were allowed to observe was perceived as being quite meaningful by everyone involved.

Beginning with 1975-76, each Local Education Agency participating in Project Outreach is under contract with Jacksonville State University for in-service training. The fourteen Local Education Agencies involved in Outreach were each allocated funds in the amount of $300.00 to secure qualified consultants for in-service training. The agreement specifies that the Project Coordinator will be available to work with the appointed designee of each school system in identifying local in-service needs, selection of consultants and to serve in an advisory capacity when requested. The purpose of the contracts is to insure that each of the cooperating systems is treated fairly and to provide each system with a minimum base of support.

An assessment workshop for educational diagnosticians in the Northeast Alabama area was offered during the Fall of 1975, on the Jacksonville State campus to the fourteen systems involved in Outreach. This workshop was sponsored in cooperation with the Alabama State Department of Education, Program for Exceptional Children and Youth. A maximum of two educational diagnosticians from each system were invited to participate. Jacksonville State made three semester hours

of graduate credit (SPE 532, Educational Assessment of Exceptional Children) available to participants.

The first year that Project Outreach was funded by the Bureau was 1974-75. The first year of a new three year grant is being initiated in 1975-76, and the Project Director is Dr. Gregory Frith. In addition, a new faculty member, Cynthia Harper, was employed to serve as Project Coordinator. Salary funds are being distributed on a 25/75% basis, respectively. External consultants will continue to be used, particularly in areas other than mental retardation and emotional disturbance.